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Summary

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines a subject that we all deal with on a daily basis: dress. The definition of dress used here is more all-encompassing than some may expect; it includes not only clothing, but all modifications and additions to the body, such as jewellery, make-up, hairdos, perfume, and tattoos. This study aims to elucidate the relation between dress and group identity, or more specifically, a religiously defined group identity. Earlier research on this subject has mainly focused on the uniform-like clothing of some religious sects and on Muslim women's clothing. But what about all those believers that do not wear clothing that is quite so obvious? To answer this question, I chose to study dress practices among the Christians of Egypt.

Studying the (Coptic) Christians of Egypt offered the unique possibility of not only analysing dress practices today, but also making a comparison to dress among Egyptian Christians in the past, as many textiles and other materials have been preserved from the first millennium CE. This dissertation is therefore divided into two parts. Part I, on the contemporary period, is based on anthropological fieldwork, including interviews and participant observation, among middle-class Copts in Fayoum City and the village of Fidimeen. Part II looks at the period from the third until the first half of the thirteenth century CE and is based on the archaeological and (art-)historical analysis of textiles, images, and texts. This particular time frame was chosen because it allows us to compare dress strategies among this group in very different societal circumstances: during the rise of Christianity, as a majority in the Byzantine period, dwindling to a minority after the Arabic conquest, and currently as a minority.

Although it seems logical that there is a relationship between dress and identity, the exact nature of this relation is less clear. **Chapter two** explores this issue, by delving into current academic views on identity, religion, and dress. To start, this dissertation is based on the premise that identity is a social construct: it is something that one does rather than one is. There are two sides to social identity as a process: *self-identification* by the person or group themselves and *categorization* by outsiders. These, of course, influence one another, but they also cannot exist without one another. To induce a sense of community, 'Others' need to be defined – there needs to be a 'they' for there to be an 'us'.

To better understand the social mechanics of dress and group identity I developed two sensitizing concepts: *dress norms* and *dress markers*. Dress norms are the unwritten rules or expectations as to how a person falling within a particular *category* dresses in a particular *context* – in other words, what is considered appropriate or normal. We categorize others based on our internalized knowledge of dress norms, and we dress according to a particular dress norm to try to influence how we are categorized by others. Dress norms are not static; through practice they are constantly re-enacted and renewed. They are also not rigid, as they leave plenty of room for personal preferences. For an individual it takes a certain amount of social and sartorial competence to 'get it right', but dress norms can also be stretched and dress can be used to play with associated categories and question them.

All forms of dress carry various associations (meanings), which are historically and culturally situated and dependent on the wearer, the viewer, and the context. *Dress markers* are those items or aspects that are heavily associated with a particular group and have a high

degree of symbolic meaning attributed to them (e.g. a wedding ring). They are used to demarcate a person as belonging to a group and, as such, play an important role in both identification and categorization. Dress markers are a part of dress norms. Effectively, these two concepts represent two slightly different but intertwined perspectives on dress; dress norms conceptualize structure and agency in dress, while the concept of markers leans more towards the semiotics-inspired view that dress conveys meaning.

Based on these theoretical concepts and on the aim of understanding the role of dress in the construction of a religious group identity, the following subquestions were formulated:

- Is dress used to signify, reinforce, or delimit an Egyptian Christian identity?
- If so, in what ways? Through which norms, tastes, or markers?
- How do other, intersecting identities, such as gender, age, and status, influence Coptic dress practices?
- What impact do the clergy have on Coptic dress practices? And what role does the dress of clergymen and monastics play in the construction of a Coptic sense of identity?

In addition, based on expected outcomes two hypotheses were proposed. Firstly, that the Coptic community and especially the clergy uses continuity to legitimize its existence and that this continuity is reified, amongst others things, through dress. Secondly, that the degree to which a religious minority sartorially distinguishes itself and does or does not dress like the majority is primarily dependent on its position within society and the views of the majority on the minority.

PART I

In **chapter 3** a short introduction is given to the position of Christians in modern-day Egypt. This dissertation focuses on Coptic Orthodox Christians, the largest Christian denomination in Egypt, making up between five and ten percent of the population. In general, Christians and Muslims live peacefully side by side, but religious revivals on both sides in the seventies have led to social entrenchment. As a minority, Copts suffer various degrees of implicit and explicit discrimination. In addition, violent sectarian incidents, in which riotous mobs vent smouldering frustrations at Copts, have occurred with some regularity over the past years. In general, most Copts strategically undercommunicate their identity. Coptic men often emphasize that they are Egyptians and that there is (or should be) no difference between Muslims and Christians.

The second section of chapter 3 continues with a description of the history of dress in Egypt in the past two centuries: from Ottoman fashions to European influences, to the rise of *zayy il-islāmi*, a modern Islamic style of dress. Especially this last trend is crucial. Both Muslim and Christian women used to veil in public. This changed during the twentieth century, when more and more women discarded the headscarf, especially in the cities. However, with the Islamic revival, which started in the seventies, Muslim women increasingly adopted modern Islamic veils. In most parts of Egypt today, almost all Muslim women wear some type of headscarf in public. Christian women are therefore recognizable from their exposed hair.

Chapter 4 examines a number of identity aspects that influence Coptic dress norms but are not specific to the Copts. It discusses gender, social age, and class. Additionally, it details a number of contexts that influence the way Copts dress on a daily basis: in the house and in public, in the village and in the city, and at work. My respondents dressed in different types of outfits according to the dress norm that they felt pertained to the context and the category they strove to fall into. For example, in the city many women felt free to wear more revealing

clothing, which would cause gossip when worn in the village. At the same time, they also felt more pressure to look sophisticated in this urban context.

One of the things that stood out in the interviews was the dominance of a narrative in which the importance of covering the woman's body was emphasized. Clothes should not be 'too short' or 'too tight', to prevent people from staring and generally eliciting 'troubles'. This narrative occurred in the discourse that I categorized as traditional, as well as in the one that can be termed religious. Inherent in these narratives is the view of a woman's body as intrinsically sexual, which she can either emphasize or suppress (i.e. cover) through dress. In *practice*, women employed several strategies to compensate for dress that might be considered too revealing, thereby trying to find the right balance between constructing themselves as attractive and as moral through dress. Interestingly, there was no equivalent narrative pertaining to men, even though for them the dress norm in *practice* was even more covering than it was for women.

Transitions between social age categories were often accompanied by changes in dress, and dress norms differed per age group. Especially when youngsters started university in the city – a new context with different dress norms – looks and fashion would become more important. The adult generation, however, generally framed fashion as corruptive, describing their own clothing as more simple and modest. Accordingly, youngsters getting married or starting work would start to dress more 'seriously' in order to be categorized as, and thereby become, adults. Similarly, elderly men and women described their own, more traditional clothing as morally superior to that of the adult generation under them.

An important distinction in the Egyptian sartorial landscape is between clothing that is viewed as modern and clothing described as traditional – the latter of which is epitomized by the *ǧallabiyya*. While the former is associated with education and sophistication, the *ǧallabiyya* is strongly associated with the stereotype of the Egyptian farmer, who is typified as conservative and backward, but also authentic and moral. This distinction is intertwined with differences in dress norms between white-collar (governmental) jobs and menial labour, between the city and the village, and between the generations. For example, my middle-class respondents would change to a shirt and trousers when visiting the city or going to their white-collar jobs, while in the village or at home most of them preferred to wear a *ǧallabiyya*. In the village the *ǧallabiyya* does not have a negative connotation and wearing other clothing can even be considered presumptuous. Whereas for women dress norms in different contexts revolved around modesty, for men their status was key; the different *types* of clothing were socially charged.

Chapter 5 continues on the subject of context by discussing communal celebrations and life cycle ceremonies. These communal contexts, which are dominated by a Coptic audience and often take place in a church, are essential because this is where Copticness and communal Coptic dress norms are enacted. When going to church, both men and women try to dress slightly nicer than usual. Women also said that they preferred to dress more modestly and wear less make-up. For the two main Coptic festivals of Christmas and Easter people buy new clothing if they can – a custom which they share with their Muslim neighbours. Congregants wear their best and, for this occasion, looking good takes precedence over modesty in make-up and clothing in church. Afterwards, the exuberant masses walk home, congratulating one another in the streets, temporarily turning the public space, normally dominated by the perceived Muslim gaze, Coptic.

During the liturgy, women have to cover their hair. Headscarves for this purpose are usually small and white, sometimes with the image of a saint printed on them – and therefore

noticeably unlike Muslim headscarves. The consensus is that they should be worn the whole time, but in practice women often wait to cover their carefully styled hairdos. Hair length is an important part the construction of gender; a woman's long hair is considered the symbol of her femininity ('her crown') and therefore her sexuality. It needs to be covered so as not to distract men. The practice of the headscarf reifies the religious narrative that the man is the head of the woman and legitimizes traditional maxims on the dangerous sexuality of women.

During the ceremonies of the baptism and the wedding, the transition to a new social status is symbolized through clothing. After the baptism, the child is dressed in white, symbolizing pureness, and a red ribbon, referring to the blood of Christ, is tied around him or her. This ribbon is also tied around the groom or the couple during the wedding ceremony. In addition, the groom, as the priest of this new household, is robed in the priest's mantle and the bride and groom are crowned, as king and queen and as martyrs for each other.

In addition to the official Church ceremonies, there are also a number of customs that take place outside of this context, such as the seventh day feast, circumcision, and the wedding party. Some of these irk Church authorities and in the past decades they have responded, for example, by adding a priest-supervised ritual or by labelling these celebrations as 'traditional' or even 'unchristian'. Another example of tension between the clergy and laity concerns the clothing worn for wedding and engagement ceremonies. The bride often wears a sumptuous dress with bare shoulders. As a solution, a small white mantle was introduced, which is put over her shoulders for the ceremony. Similarly, the women of the wedding party wear *soirée*, tight evening dresses without sleeves. These draw much criticism from priests and conservative Copts, but are nonetheless the dress norm in this context – although women compromise by drawing a matching shawl over their shoulders in church. Wearing *soirée* is an indulgence much looked forward to. Women can only wear it in this context because of the joyfulness of the occasion and because the audience is (almost) entirely Coptic; they are not exposed to the gaze of Muslim outsiders.

The last of the life cycle ceremonies is, of course, that of death and mourning. After someone has died female relatives wear black clothes in public. The mourning period usually lasts between forty days and a year, depending on whether the deceased was a more distant or close relative. During this time they are also not supposed to partake in 'happy' activities, wear make-up, etc. A widow wears black for several years, until she feels ready to remarry. Men do not wear black but externalize their grief for a brief period of time by not shaving and wearing unpretentious clothing, thereby displaying their neglect of appearances. The Church labels the black clothes of the women a cultural rather than religious tradition and men often mock female lamenting practices. There is, nonetheless, considerable social pressure for women to conform. Most women dislike how the black clothes make them feel depressed, but would not dare be the first one to start wearing colours again, out of fear of being considered disrespectful – the length of mourning is effectively dependent on the consensus among the mourners and the local norm.

Chapter 6 delves into the uniforms of the clergy and monastics of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Most boys first get involved in the Church as deacons. When assisting during the liturgy they wear a white robe called a *tōnya*, with a *badrušīl* sash wrapped around the body. It was often mentioned that the way in which it is wrapped indicates their rank, but the rules stated in the interviews did not always correspond to actual practice. During the mass, priests also wear a *tōnya*, combined with a mitre-like *ṭaylasāna*, and usually a stole called a *ṣadra*. For the major festivals they add the *bornos* mantle. Their everyday outfit consists of a black robe similar to the ordinary *ḡallabiyya*, a cross necklace, and a domed black felt hat, called an *'imma*, or a black skullcap. They are also expected to grow a beard. Although officially a priest is supposed to wear

all of his ceremonial vestments for each sacrament, in practice they just wear the black outfit for baptisms, weddings, and funerals, sometimes covered with a *šadra*, and only put on the white *tōnya* for the service of the altar.

Monks wear a black robe and cross necklace and grow a beard, similar to the priest, but combine it with a hood called the *qalansuwa*. The blackness of the outfit symbolizes their status as being 'dead to the world'. They also wear a leather belt underneath to remind them of their vows of poverty and chastity. Nuns wear the same items but with added head veils. Whereas monks are expected to let their beards and hair grow to indicate their disregard for worldly dress norms, nuns cut their hair (and remove their earrings) – symbolizing the renunciation of their female sexuality. In addition to contemplative nuns, there are also active nuns and consecrated women, but their position is contested. They are distinguished by their grey robes and do not wear the marker of a monastic: the *qalansuwa*. They also do not cut their hair, as they continue to participate in the world.

In its official discourse the Church emphasizes its antiquity and continuity, also in dress. Nonetheless, a number of changes in the uniform of the priests and monks have occurred in the past fifty years: the *faraḡiyya* over-robe has fallen out of use, priests have started wearing a solid hat rather than a wrapped turban, the *šamla* headveil is now restricted to officiating priest monks, and the *qalansuwa* hood was (re-)introduced. Notably, changes were often trivialized in terms of practicalities, especially when it came to the disappearance of items, whereas new elements were framed as *more* authentic through reference to biblical and other ancient sources.

Priests try to influence the way the laity dress, usually through sermons. These are mostly directed at girls' and women's dress. At times, priests pick a particular fad to argue against – such as lipstick in church or trousers – and can decide to withhold the communion to offenders. However, in the end they are usually unable to stave off developments in dress norms and can only to a limited extent prescribe how congregants should dress in church.

Chapter 7 discusses how Copts do and do not dress differently from the predominantly Muslim population of Egypt. Most of my respondents said that Coptic women were easy to recognize from the fact that they do not wear a headscarf. In practice this distinction is more nuanced; women from the lower classes and rural backgrounds do wear a headscarf, tied in the nape of the neck, and older ladies also wear various types of headscarves – just not the Islamic-style veils. Christian women were also said to wear different clothes, which were sometimes described as more short and tight compared to the long and wide clothes of Muslim women. A number of types of clothing, such as long overdresses and ankle-length skirts, indeed seem to have become associated with Muslim women and are therefore only rarely worn by Christians. Gold jewellery with Christian images is popular among women. It is, however, not primarily worn to show their Christianity, but rather 'because it is gold' and sometimes because these images are considered to have beneficial properties. It does of course indicate to others that they are Christian, but usually this is already evident from the rest of their appearance.

In contrast to women, men were deemed far harder to recognize from the way they look. My respondents often indicated that they recognized men in other ways: because they knew them or had a feeling about them, from their name, or from their female company. Interestingly, respondents often used *anti-markers*, the absence of signs that indicate that someone is Muslim to gauge if a person is Christian. These included the forehead callous, beard, and silver jewellery. Especially beards were heavily associated with devout Salafist Muslims and with priests, and were therefore considered inappropriate for Coptic men. Some young boys wore cross necklaces, but these are worn underneath the shirt, out of sight. Generally, adult men did not

wear them, because jewellery is associated with women, but also because it goes against the norm for them to display their religious affiliation openly in public – doing so would draw unwanted attention.

There is only one true *dress marker* of Coptic identity: the cross tattoo. Almost all of my respondents had a small tattoo of a cross on the inside of the right wrist. This tattoo is usually set at a young age at the instigation of family members, although some of my respondents only got it in their teens. The motivations for getting it varied from ‘to show I am Christian’ to ‘to remind me of Christ’ to it serving as a form of blessing or protection. The cross tattoo plays an important role in the Coptic identity narrative and is often used to symbolize the community. In practice, however, it is difficult to recognize (i.e. categorize) Christians based on the tattoo, as it is often hard to make out – although it is used to identify oneself to others as (also) Christian.

When discussing differences in clothing between Muslims and Christians, my respondents espoused different views depending on the context. There were four particularly characteristic narratives. Firstly, the *sameness* narrative, generally adopted by men about men, states that there is (or should be) no difference in appearances and that they are ‘normal’. Secondly, the *adaptation* narrative emphasizes the importance of adapting or fitting into Muslim-dominated society. Inherently, it recognizes the minority status of Copts but suggests that their status can be improved through dress. Typically this view was adopted regarding women’s clothing. Thirdly, the *differentiation* narrative argues that there should be difference; that Copts should not dress like (devout) Muslims. In other words, they should not cross and thereby blur community boundary lines. A related fourth narrative was often adopted when I asked if someone would perhaps be tempted to hide their Christian identity: ‘to hide your identity is to hide from God’. Although passing in effect was normal for men, purposefully hiding one’s identity or pretending one is Muslim was severely frowned upon.

Opinions on Muslim dress can be categorized into three main narratives. Firstly, ‘it is not our business’, a politically correct, apathetic statement often used to avoid the question. Secondly, the *modesty* narrative is an ambivalent stance, usually adopted by more devout respondents (and some church officials). It frames the dress of Islamic women as more modest than that of Christian women, because it covers more of the body. In contrast, the *immodesty* narrative asserts the reverse: that Muslim women’s dress is often immodest – usually referring to girls wearing tight clothes and heavy make-up combined with a headscarf. It constructs Christian women’s dress as more modest and morally sound.

The most significant intersecting identity aspect to influence Coptic dress norms is gender. Whereas men do not stand out, women do. This is not only a side-effect of the rise of Muslim dress. In general, for men it is far less acceptable to show their Christianity than it is for women. This difference seems to be related to the position of women and men in Egypt. Women still derive most of social standing from their position as good daughters, wives, or mothers. Men are considered public actors; the fact that their dress does not stand out ensures their functioning within society at large. Women, on the other hands, are ‘culture carriers’, expected to keep the traditions and raise the children into the faith. Consequently, they are the marked ones. This is also why men do not wear mourning dress; it would place them outside of public society. In day-to-day encounters, Egyptian Christians, like everybody else, highlight the part of their identity that they have in common or consider most relevant at that time; immediate categorization or stigmatization as ‘Christian’ limits their possibilities of self-presentation.

PART II

Chapter 8 starts with a short historical introduction on the processes of Christianization and Islamization. Pre-Christian Roman Egypt was characterized by a plethora of cults, shrines, and religious experts. Christianity did not sweep in and raze this religious landscape; it developed within and in dialogue with it. Nonetheless, the fourth century was marked by the rapid growth of the number of Christians and the increasing institutionalization of the Church. Egypt was at this time a province of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and fell under the imperial Church. Following theological power struggles, the Church of Alexandria famously rejected the Council of Chalcedon of 451, which eventually led to a schism between the Chalcedonian Melkite Church endorsed by the Byzantine emperor and the anti-Chalcedonian Church of Egypt, later to become the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Around 643 Egypt was conquered by the Arabs, and the Christians and Jews became 'protected people', *ḍimmī*. The Arab occupation was at first limited to the newly established garrison-settlement of Fustat (today absorbed into the modern city of Cairo), but this changed around the eighth century as Arab groups settled in the hinterland, the administrative system was centralized, and Arabic was increasingly used for administrative purposes. Conversion to Islam was not encouraged in the first few centuries, although periods marked by harassment and discrimination did lead to increases in the number of converts. Egypt prospered in the tenth century as the Fatimid dynasty established its court in Cairo, putting it at the centre of its expanding empire. The time period under study ends in 1250, when rise to power of the Mamluks hailed a new era of Turkish influence.

Chapter 9 gives an overview of the current state of research on archaeological textiles dating between the third century to the thirteenth. It starts out by discussing some of the difficulties of this particular material. For most of the objects in museums, contextual information is lacking and it is therefore often unknown who wore the garment (of what gender, age, status, religion, etc.) and to which time period it dates. To be able to address the former issue this chapter starts with the latter: what types of garments were worn when?

In the Late Roman period (third and fourth centuries) white linen garments with purple woollen decorative elements such as *clavi* – two vertical stripes set next to the neckslit – prevail in the archaeological record. Tunics were T-shaped, with wide or narrow sleeves, and a slit for the neck. The purple decorative elements that adorned them were typically filled with intricate interlacing or geometric patterns in thin white threads. A draped or pinned mantle could be worn over the tunic, and women wore various head-coverings, including colourful sprang hairnets and caps, usually covered with a mantle or veil.

In the Byzantine period (fifth to the first half of the seventh century) tunics were mainly narrow-sleeved or very wide and sleeveless and were woven to shape in one piece. The decoration of garments became more elaborate, now also including floral and figurative motifs, such as animals, humans, and mythological scenes. Especially hunting scenes and dancing figures – usually referring to the followers of Dionysos – were popular. A number of mummies from Antinoë were buried dressed in Eastern-style coats with long sleeves, often combined with shirts and trousers or chaps. These garments were cut and sewn rather than woven to shape and were embellished with applied bands along the edges. The coats date to between the fifth and first half of the seventh century – indicating that they were already worn before the Persian occupation of Egypt in 619 to 629. Interestingly, these garments seem to have started a trend, because from the sixth century onwards applied bands became very popular.

In the Early Islamic period (second half of the seventh until the end of the tenth century) purpose-made decorative elements such as roundels and clavi were, like the bands, often applied rather than woven into the fabric. Especially conspicuous are the very large decorative elements filled with figurative scenes of, for example, biblical stories and horsemen. There is a notable increase in multi-coloured decoration, in contrast to the earlier periods when monochrome decoration predominated in garments.

Less is known about the Fatimid and Ayyubid period (end of the tenth until the first half of the thirteenth century), as few complete garments have been dated to this time period. Nonetheless, a remarkable shift can be noted. Tunics now usually consisted of several panels sewn together to form a very wide, bag-shaped garment or a long shirt similar to the modern *ġallabiyya*. Most surviving examples are undyed and made from cotton or linen, but this lack of colour could also be due to a change in burial practices. Garments were often decorated with lines of embroidery, and *tirāz* textiles, decorated with bands of writing, became very popular. These texts usually comprised relatively standardized praises and requests for blessings. Trousers also became more common, as well as caps and turbans.

Chapter 10 moves to the question of identity and dress and looks specifically at dress norms pertaining to gender, age, and status. With regards to women's dress, one particular discourse stands out in the writings of a number of early Christian authors. In it, a relation is drawn between adornment, women, and immorality – a view which can be retraced to imperial Rome. Adornment was considered a vice inherent to the female character. Early Christian authors built upon this existing moral framework, exhorting Christian women to give up adornment with the aim of proving Christians morally superior. This type of discourse, of course, not only engaged in delineating moral boundaries but also in constructing gender.

One of the major points of gender distinction concerned hair. While the virility of a man was attested by his beard or stubble, a woman's long hair was considered the 'natural' reification of her femininity. Women were required to cover their hair, the epitome of their sexuality, but this did not stop them from emphasizing their mane. Finds in graves reveal elaborately plaited hairstyles, as well as artificial stuffing, hairpieces, and *bourrelets* (a stuffed role of fabric originally attached to a mantle which encircled the head) meant to create the appearance of a large hairdo. Small figurines and female heads, dating from the Late Roman to Early Islamic period, were probably used to attract good fortune in marriage and childbirth, are also characterized by oversized hairdos, symbolizing their hyper-femininity. Hair as a marker of femininity seems to have become more ambiguous in the Islamic period when long braided hair and large head covers (i.e. the turban) also became fashionable among men – although, perhaps in compensation, full beards had by then become the norm among men.

Regarding other forms of gender distinction, in texts and depictions jewellery, with the exception of finger rings, was the prerogative of women, which seems to be confirmed by the archaeological record. Also, depictions often show men wearing shorter tunics than women. It is, however, difficult to distinguish if a tunic was originally worn by a man or a woman based on its length; a long tunic for a short woman would be about the same length as a short tunic for a tall man. It is unlikely that relatively short tunics (<106 cm) were worn by women, but we cannot exclude that longer tunics (>111 cm) were worn by men. As such, it is difficult to confirm if particular forms of decoration, such as hunting scenes or Maenads, were more commonly worn by men or women.

Children's clothing was very similar to their adults', although both girls and boys wore jewellery – boys were not considered men yet. Texts describe how children were often decked out with charms to protect them or to attract good fortune. These included particular designs

(such as *lunulae* pendants) but probably also the red unspun threads often woven into linen garments. There is evidence of coming-of-age rites in the Roman period, but these seem to have disappeared by the Byzantine period. For boys, facial hair was considered a sign of their transition to men. For girls, womanhood and marriage were intertwined. At this stage they were also expected to start covering their hair. The new category of Christian ‘virgins’, however, blurred the boundary between virgin girls and married, sexually active women. Special veiling ceremonies to consecrate virgins were one way in which this issue was resolved. Old age was not marked by a particular type of clothing although widowhood was for women associated with a less ostentatious appearance, duller colours, and less jewellery.

Of course, dress was one of the means through which the higher classes distinguished themselves from the lower; through the use of expensive materials or by the sheer volume of cloth. In depictions, farmers and servants can be recognized from their lack of clothing, with hoisted-up hems and sleeves or without overgarments altogether. At the same time, personal attendants and entertainers were decked out in rich attire to display the wealth of their masters. Specific types of clothing were also connected to status because they were associated with particular activities. For example, Persian-style men’s clothing seems to have been associated with hunting and horse-riding – both upper class pursuits. In addition, particular items of dress functioned as badges of office, such as crossbow *fibulae* pins and mantles decorated with square *tabulae* panels, but standardized uniforms were rare. This point also returns in chapter 11.

Chapter 11 looks at the dress of the clergy and monastics. Like the monastic movement itself, monastic dress norms took time to crystallize. Because adornment was equated to sin, ascetics strove to emphasize their neglect of appearances, for example by shunning bathing and clean clothes. Some stories even relate how hermits went as far as to discard all of their clothing. On the one hand, these bodily practices were based on an existing moral discourse; on the other hand, ascetics used inverted worldly dress norms to sartorially set themselves apart. The line between modesty and immodesty was contested, however, and several Christian authors tried to discursively claim its definition. Monastics that blurred gender boundaries, claiming to fall outside these categories (e.g. women that shaved off their hair), were condemned, for example. As the Church became more institutionalized, its representatives tried to rein in excesses that could potentially undermine the social hierarchies of the society that the Church depended upon.

Regarding the outfits worn by Egyptian monks, a number of literary texts include references to clothing, including the *Rules of Pachomius*, the *Canons of Shenoute*, the *Praktikos* by Evagrius, *De Institutis Coenobiorum* by Cassian, and the *Sayings of the Fathers*. They are relatively consistent in the items they mention: a sleeveless tunic, a hood, an animal skin (absent from the *Canons of Shenoute*), a belt, a wrapped mantle, sandals, a staff, and sometimes a shoulder strap. This consistency may, however, also have resulted from well-known texts, such as the *Rules of Pachomius*, influencing (the translation and interpretation of) others.

Turning to the archaeological evidence, monastic mummies have been found at several sites located near Thebes. A number of these were covered with a leather belt and a triangular-shaped leather apron with straps – the latter of which can probably be equated to the animal skin referred to in several texts. Two of these mummies were also wrapped or dressed in sleeveless tunics, and one wore a hood. Similar hoods decorated with cross shapes are housed in museum collections around the world. Depictions of monastic saints generally show them bearded and barefoot or with sandals, wearing relatively long tunics reaching over the knee, in one of following styles: wearing a mantle wrapped around the upper and lower body; wearing a

mantle wrapped around the upper body; wearing an apron hanging down the right side of the body and a strip of cloth slung over the left shoulder; or only wearing a tunic. The first probably represents an attempt by the artist to depict the saint in the clothing worn in ancient (Roman) times. The third corresponds to the descriptions in the literary texts, but, intriguingly, is mostly limited to depictions in or from Shenoute's monasteries or depictions of Shenoute.

Interestingly, passages from the *Canons of Shenoute* describe how the nuns that made the garments had to take into account the fit, colour, and decoration. Uniformity seems to have been the ideal and the *types* of garments worn may have been the same, but there was leeway in their exact appearance. Nonetheless, the texts indicate that a monk's outfit did function as a uniform in many ways: it was a marker of group membership, it implied a code of conduct, it was imbued with symbolic power, and it was a symbol of the state of monkhood. In addition, although the outfit may not have been *standardized*, monks were probably already from a very early period onwards *recognizable* from their simple clothes, long beards, bare feet or sandals, etc. By dressing in a way that was reminiscent of the description of Biblical prophets, they laid claim to the power and authority associated with these figures. In the fourth century, specific items were already associated with the monk's 'habit', but there is a further development of these in the fifth and sixth century. For example, the animal skin lost some of its practical function and became a more stylized marker of monastic identity instead – although we cannot be sure if this item was worn throughout Egypt. To sum up, the uniform of the monk was never 'set', but continued to change as different items became stylized, disappeared, or were replaced.

Far less is known about the dress of the clergy, but some canons and documentary papyri give an idea of liturgical clothing. In the early centuries, their outfits were probably not very different from ordinary clothing; the canons only stress that the clothes of the presiding clergy should be clean and preferably white. Around the second half of the fourth century, with the growing institutionalization of the Church, regulations were instated that the clothing worn for the service should be kept inside the church, indicating that a differentiated liturgical outfit had developed. A small number of actual garments, dating from the eighth century onwards, can reasonably be interpreted as clerical or liturgical dress. They are decorated with narrow dark *clavi*, cuff bands, and stripes near the sides, as well as small crosses – like many of the clerical and monastic tunics in depictions. At a time when garments were preferably richly decorated, this type of very simple decoration reified the clergy's austerity. In addition, similar to the monks' clothing, they visually associated the clergymen with depictions and descriptions from earlier Roman times, the time of the apostles. Additional stitched-together mantles and scarves probably functioned as hierarchical markers. Despite the fact that liturgical outfits clearly differed from everyday clothing, they were also influenced by changes in secular dress. For example, in the Islamic period the turban became part of the priest's outfit.

Chapter 12 explores if and how Christianity influenced lay dress practices. A remarkable phenomenon in this respect is the popularity of mythological themes on garments in the Byzantine period, when Christianity was widespread in Egypt. A few remaining early high quality, partially silk or gold ornaments indicate that this trend probably already started in the second or third century among the elite. They are sometimes interpreted as a way for their owners to show off their upper-class classical Greek training (*paideia*). Although this may be true for the early examples, this is unlikely to be the case for the lower-quality later ones which were probably worn by the middle class. Nonetheless, Hellenistic mythological stories had nestled themselves in popular culture and most middle-class wearers would have been able to identify and understand the images – especially since most of them refer to a relatively limited repertoire of well-known myths. The Hellenistic gods portrayed often functioned as

personifications of plenty; the images celebrated good fortune, but were also meant to invoke it. In addition, the frequently depicted Maenads, Aphrodite, Dionysos, and Herakles embodied gendered virtues such as grace, beauty, and femininity, and courage, virility, and manliness.

In the Byzantine period crosses were only rarely depicted on garments, even though they were more ubiquitous on all kinds of other household items. When they were included, they appear in compositions which were otherwise mythological. Small crosses were often set next to or near the neckslit or on the chest. They were also used to decorate children's caps. Some larger crosses imitated encrusted golden jewellery – in general, crosses were more common in jewellery. Especially the bejewelled crosses and those with small animals in between the arms seem to have been fitted into the well-known themes of the bounty and prosperity. They may (also) have had prophylactic properties: protecting the liminal space of the neck opening, for example, and imitating the protective cross-sign made on the forehead. From the Islamic period onward their appearance changed, along with changes in decoration of garments in general.

In the Early Islamic period, one particular type of decoration on clothing stands out: the large applied tapestry bands, roundels, and *clavi* that contained scenes from the Old and New Testament. Especially the tales of David and Joseph were popular. Their stories must have spoken to people's imagination; unlike the self-effacing saints that functioned as models for the clergy, these charming and handsome youths were not only blessed by God but had also been very much part of the world and had enjoyed it. Their stories are comparable to the adventures of beloved Hellenistic heroes and seem to continue the tradition of depicting gendered role models. Their rise in the early Islamic period was probably related to the fact that Egyptian Christians had to redefine themselves in opposition to a new proximate Other, the Arabs. Clothing was *not* used to visually bound off a Christian identity, but the types of decoration that were appreciated (their 'taste') changed along with the Egyptian Christian conception of themselves.

From the ninth century onwards garments with lines of Arabic texts called *ṭirāz* became particularly prevalent. Christians also wore Arabic *ṭirāz*, despite the religious connotations of some of the texts, probably because they were primarily seen as a status symbol. Interestingly, a Coptic and Greek form developed parallel to it. The texts that were chosen show that these were a Christian reinterpretation; they included comparable Christian well-wishes and replicated the concomitant custom of gifting on a domestic scale. Like the figurative scenes with Biblical scenes, they attest to a changing self-awareness and redefinition of a Christian identity.

None of the types of Christian decoration described above, from the crosses to the Biblical scenes to the Christian *ṭirāz*, were prevalent enough to have functioned as markers; their absence did not imply that the person was *not* Christian. They were also not worn to show that their wearer was Christian – although they were undoubtedly a give-away – but because they were considered beautiful or beneficial.

A number of Muslim governors and caliphs tried to impose distinctive dress on Christians and Jews, through so-called laws of differentiation or *ḡiyār*. These *ḡiyār* prescribed or prohibited specific items of dress. Prescriptions often included the belt, but at other times also coloured garments, cross necklaces, and tattoos. These imposed markers were meant to enforce segregation and to 'humble' the subjugated Christians and Jews; they exposed them to derision and harassment. Prohibitions included the *ṭaylasān* and the long decorative loose end of the turban, and were mainly directed against the upper and upper middle classes, who could afford these garments in the first place. They denied them these status symbols and thereby the attendant status. *Ḡiyār* legislation was re-introduced a number of times, suggesting that

enforcement slackened in the years in between, although the principal remained well known. Like the rest of society, Christians preferred to dress according to what was beautiful, tasteful, and fashionable; to fit in rather than stand out as a minority.

CONCLUSION

Having teased apart the plethora of social factors that influence(d) the relation between dress and identity among Egyptian Christians in the present and the past, the concluding **chapter 13** moves beyond temporal boundaries to look at the bigger picture. Referring back to the first three subquestions formulated in the introduction, we have to conclude that dress is and was, in fact, *not* deliberately used by Christians in Egypt to distinguish themselves. Only the cross-tattoo in the modern period functions as a marker of Christianity. Communal dress norms and a communal sense of what is beautiful aid(ed) in them being recognizable as Christians and reinforced a sense of groupness, but these are effects rather than objectives. Other aspects of identity such as gender, age, and status were far more important in determining dress practices. In addition, for the modern case study it became very clear that the intersection of other identity aspects with the Christian one were significant. Especially gender played an important role: it is acceptable for women to be recognizable as Christians, but not for men. Men both want and are expected by society to blend in and not to flaunt their stigma. Interestingly, in the past, *ḡiyār* legislation was aimed at exactly the opposite: to prevent Christian men from passing.

The position of the clergy and monastics is very different from ordinary Coptic Christians; whereas the latter generally do not aim to stand out, the clergy and monastics do. Their uniforms flatten other identities and – to address the fourth subquestion – make them the clearly distinguishable representatives of the Coptic community. The entire outfit functions as a dress marker. It not only endows the wearer with authority but also places him or her within the Church hierarchy. This uniform took time to develop, however. Monks were already recognizable from their choice of clothing (their dress norm) from a relatively early period onwards, but clear evidence of institutionalized markers only dates to the sixth century. As an authority, the most important influence the clergy have and had on lay dress is not so much in imposing sanctions, but rather in the way they ‘feed’ and steer moralizing discourses among the Christian community. In the end, however, they are usually unable to put a stop to the fashions that they frame as corruptive; they cannot halt the process of shifting dress norms in practice.

The first hypothesis that continuity is reified through dress and used as a legitimising tool can be partly confirmed: it is mainly the clergy that does so. In modern Egypt, almost all aspects of the clerical and monastic uniform were explained in terms of the past, even when it came to the (re-)introduction of elements. Also in the past, the dress of clergymen and monastics visually referred to how biblical figures were thought to have dressed. Among the laity in the present, continuity is an important part of the communal identity narrative and is used to legitimate prevalent religious and traditional discourses on dress, but plays little role in their choice of dress; dress is not used to reify this continuity. The exception is again the cross tattoo, the one dress marker. Its story is steeped in the shared historical narrative of persecution and martyrdom. Also, the fact that almost everybody, from the very old to the very young, has one today, induces a sense of continuity and belonging. In the past, some of the decoration of lay garments with biblical role models and psalm texts can be interpreted as referring back to a biblical past, but it seems unlikely that these were worn to reify continuity.

The second hypothesis that the degree to which a religious minority sartorially distinguishes themselves is primarily dependent on its position in society is false. When we

compare between the Copts in contemporary Egypt (a minority), Egyptian Christians in Byzantine Egypt (the majority), and Egyptian Christians after the Islamic conquest (numerically in the majority, but subjugated) there is no significant difference. In all of these periods their dress was fully a part of Egyptian dress norms in general, except for the times when laws of differentiation were imposed and enforced. In all cases, Egyptian Christians did not (prefer to) distinguish themselves as Christian through dress. Context is an important factor, but more in terms of situational context. In modern Egypt, Copts adapt their dress according to the context with an expected audience in mind, and specifically whether this audience is largely Christian or Muslim.

With regards to (self-) *identification*, other aspects of an individual's identity, such as gender, age, and status proved more important factors than religion in determining dress. Dress is about fitting in, being *en vogue*, looking good. The communal (religious) homologous *habitus* does influence dress norms and what is considered attractive, but only within the societal framework of existing dress norms. Religiously loaded items of dress, when used, are usually not worn with the aim to distinguish oneself. Instead, they are used to attract good and protect from evil, to reify and mediate divine power, and in some cases to feel part of a group. Only for those for whom their religion is their life, i.e. the clergy and monastics, is it worthwhile to stand out. They withdraw largely, but not fully, from existing dress norms and place themselves in a separate category, with its own dress norms. In this sense they are comparable to religious sects that place themselves outside of mainstream society through dress.

Concerning *categorization* (i.e. identifying someone else), indicators that somebody was *not* Christian proved very important in the modern case study. This focus on recognizing outsiders is inherent to the process of group identification, in which an Other is defined to create a sense of 'us'. The concept of *markers* proved insufficient in this respect. Markers are a symbol of group identity, but there are many lower level *indicators* and especially *anti-indicators* that are used in categorization. Whereas somebody wearing a group marker *must* be part of this group, indicators make it more *likely* that they are part of this group. These are not necessarily worn with this group identity in mind, but may reveal that a person belongs to it nonetheless. This study has explored many important aspects of the relation between dress and group identity, but has limited itself to one side of the coin. To understand the processes described above more fully I aim to continue this study by also looking at the Other side: Muslim Egyptians.